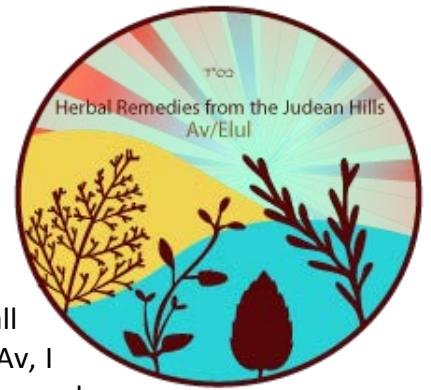


– צמחי מרפא לפני הצום Helpful Herbs before Fasting

Keep Yourself Moisturized in Anticipation of a Summer Fast

As the scorching sun is at its zenith, the fast of the Ninth of Av is before us. In Israel, this is the hardest of all the fasts, as it starts at sundown on one of the longest and hottest days of the year. I recall my first years in the Torah world. During most of the fast of Tisha b'Av, I was thinking about watermelon rather than crying over the loss of our dear Temple. Now, as a seasoned faster, the long summer fasts pass easily. The hardest part is usually breaking the fast in a healthy, non-gluttonous way. In Israel today, you can buy special herbal pills to take before the fast, but if you prepare for the fast sensibly through diet and herbs, these pills are unnecessary. Preparing for a summer fast entails keeping your system as moisturized as possible to avoid excess thirst. First of all, start the day before fasting by drinking a lot of water. Supplement with moisturizing and demulcent herbal teas, listed further on, and possibly with a cup or two of grape-juice.



Consume Slow Digesting Wholesome Foods Prior to the Fast

In view of the long hours of the upcoming fast, it is beneficial to consume slow digesting, fiber-containing foods rather than fast-digesting foods. The satisfaction from slow digesting foods lasts up to 8 hours, whereas fast-digesting foods leave you hungry already 3 to 4 hours after the meal. Slow-digesting foods include grains and seeds like wheat, spelt, barley, whole oats, wild rice, millet, buckwheat, beans, lentils, whole wheat or rye bread etc. (These are also called complex carbohydrates). Fast-burning foods are foods that contain sugar, white flour, etc. (These are also called refined carbohydrates). Fiber-containing foods include whole wheat, bran, whole grains, seeds and vegetables such as green beans, peas, beets, carrots, spinach, beet-leaves (iron-rich) and fruits with their skin, especially dried apricots, figs, prunes, almonds, etc. Eat a well-balanced meal containing foods from each food group, i.e. fruits, vegetables, proteins and grains. Make sure to include complex carbohydrates during the pre-fast meal, so that the food lasts longer, making you less hungry. From the fruit group, dates are an excellent source of natural sugar, fiber, carbohydrates, potassium and magnesium. Almonds are rich in protein and fiber with less fat. Bananas are a good source of potassium, magnesium and carbohydrates. Limit unhealthy fried, fatty and sugary foods. They cause indigestion, heartburn, and weight gain. Do not over-eat during the meal before fasting. Too much water or tea during the meal before fasting causes more urination, which loses valuable mineral salts that your body needs during the upcoming fast day.

Licorice – The Sweet Demulcent Fasters' Friend

Personally, the main herb I take before fasting is licorice root. Among its many medicinal properties, licorice helps keep your body liquefied. For that reason, it is contra-indicated for people who suffer from edema. (Pregnant women and people with heart, liver or kidney issues should also avoid licorice). Licorice root is a potent anti-inflammatory, mild, natural laxative, expectorant, demulcent (soothing), mild sedative and chi (energy) tonic. In Chinese medicine, it has been used for centuries to improve energy, alleviate coughs and colds, strengthen digestion, treat gastro-intestinal problems, and female reproductive issues. As an anti-inflammatory and demulcent herb, licorice root brings fast relief for sore throat, cough and colds. It is an effective expectorant that alleviates dryness of the lungs, while helping to loosen and expel mucus through coughing. In the medical journal *Molecular and Cellular Endocrinology*, licorice was found to help

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the body more efficiently regulate cortisol – the stress hormone – thus improving the response to stress while giving the adrenal glands a break. One study published in *Food Chemistry*, described licorice as having “antioxidant, free-radical scavenging, immune-stimulating” properties. It clears heat, detoxifies poisons, and relieves abdominal pains and spasms. Licorice root also works as a natural remedy for ulcers and can be beneficial for a leaky gut. Due to its estrogen-like effect, licorice is a natural remedy in the treatment of menstrual- and fertility-related syndromes, including PMS. For treatment of menopause, licorice was shown in a Health Care for Women International study to be more effective than hormone replacement therapy for reducing the duration of hot flashes. I make a licorice root decoction by simmering the threaded roots in a large pot for 20 minutes. Then, I drink the delicious sweet licorice tea throughout the day prior to fasting. This drink helps me retain body fluids while preventing the loss of mineral salts in the urine.

Herbs to Use Before Fasting

Fasting is actually healthy for both body and soul when done properly, by eating and drinking before and after in a sensible, self-disciplined way. Periodic fasting allows the digestive system to rest and clear itself. A fast can have numerous health benefits, including reduction of pain, relief from digestive upset, clearer thought processes, weight loss, and general health improvement. In excess conditions, fasting and the taking of bitter, eliminative and detoxifying herbs beforehand helps your body cleanse itself and eliminate intestinal parasites. Some cleansing herbs that enhance elimination include dandelion root, with its bitter, sweet and cool energetics. It is used for all heated liver conditions, breast tumors, abscesses, boils, fluid retention, stomach disorders, and constipation. Dandelion root is one of the best remedies for treating hepatitis and a possible preventative for breast cancer. Honeysuckle, with the same energetics as dandelion is used for infections and inflammations with its broad spectrum anti-microbial and anti-bacterial properties. It is very effective against fevers, colds and flues and is regarded as a reliable antibiotic herb, similar to Echinacea. Recent studies in China have found it to be effective in the treatment of certain cancers, especially of the breast. It is useful for sore throat and conjunctivitis, as well as inflammations of the intestines, urinary tract and reproductive organs.

Demulcent Herbs/Yin Tonics for Retaining Moisture and Alleviating Thirst

In addition to licorice, marshmallow root is also a bitter, sweet, and cooling yin tonic that helps to moisturize the body prior to a fast. It has nutritive, alterative, diuretic, demulcent, emollient, vulnerary and laxative properties. It treats wasting and thirsting diseases, tuberculosis, diabetes, cough, dryness and inflammation of the lungs, gangrene, septicemia, ulcers, kidney stones, difficult or painful urination and vomiting. Similarly, Solomon's seal is a sweet cooling yin and chi tonic, beneficial before a fast due to its nutritive, expectorant, and mild diaphoretic properties. In addition to being a heart tonic, it treats chronic wasting and consumptive diseases, tuberculosis, diabetes, and dry cough. It also heals broken bones and builds reproductive secretions. Slippery elm is one of the most mucilaginous herbs, and good before a fast. This sweet, neutral herb is also a yin tonic, with nutritive, demulcent, expectorant, emollient, astringent, and vulnerary properties. It treats sore throat, coughs, bleeding from the lungs and other lung problems, dryness of the throat, wasting diseases, digestive problems and nausea.

Reconnecting with the Temple of Our Soul

Once we have prepared properly for the fast of Tisha b'Av, our mind and heart can be clear from thinking about food during the fast. This allows us to focus on mourning for the Temple. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler writes that the purpose of mourning and suffering is to turn our heart away from

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mundane affairs and cause us to abandon the idea that our salvation lies in that direction. Then, it is possible to ignite the spark of truth in our heart. When we get in touch with the true spark of our soul, it opens the way to repentance, which is the greatest consolation. As long as we are unable to rebuild the Temple in our soul, by reconnecting with our Divine spark, the Temple in Jerusalem likewise lies in ruins. Until we are able to build a permanent home for the *Shechinah* (Feminine Divine Indwelling Presence), we experience both personal and cosmic exile, as the essence of exile is the exile of the Shechinah. It follows that repentance, which ends the exile of the Shechinah in the individual, is identical with redemption for that person.

Practical Tips for Breaking the Fast

Once the fast comes to an end, we hope that the strengthening of our soul we experienced on Tisha b'Av will illuminate the rest of our summer. Breaking the fast properly gives us the ability to take its spiritual message with us into our mundane activities. It is important to make a gradual transition back into eating, rather than stuffing ourselves or going out to a sumptuous dinner. Breaking a fast must be planned and done carefully and slowly to prevent overburdening the digestive system which has been at rest. Therefore, it is especially important to eat slowly and chew our foods very well. The first thing after a fast is to drink water. I drink about $\frac{3}{4}$ liter after the fast and every morning. I recommend drinking at least several cups of water, and then waiting half an hour or at least 15 minutes before eating. The first thing to eat after a fast and every morning is fresh fruit, such as melon, grapes, peaches or plums. Then again, wait about 15 minutes before eating the rest of your meal. Eat a nice light meal with veggies, grains, and protein. Don't forget to eat everything slowly and chew well. If you follow these guidelines, you will G-d willing feel healthy and energized after the fast rather than tired out.

Hands On

During a fast, our body does not take in sufficient energy but instead breaks down skeletal muscle and converts it into energy. The first foods to consume upon breaking a fast are critical to nourish the body, and should not expend much energy to digest and assimilate. Raw fruit juices, smoothies and fruit contain much water content and are therefore easily digested. You could break your fast by drinking a cup of freshly squeezed fruit juice, followed by 2 cups of mixed fruit. Minimize citrus fruits at first since they may feel too acidic in your stomach. Organic vegetables free of pesticides, hormones and antibiotics are also ideal after a fast. A small salad of fresh dark green leafy vegetables, tomatoes and cucumbers are easy on the stomach and packed with nutrients. Make sure to add some mixed sprouts, which digest easily and contain an abundance of concentrated nutrients, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

Herbal Formula to Aid Fasting, Neutralize Acids and Alleviate Hunger

Dandelion root (chief herb)
 Black pepper (chief, assistant and conducting)
 Cleavers (assisting)
 Fennel seed (conducting)
 Cardamom seed (conducting)
 Licorice Root (harmonizing)